

6 APR 1972

# Letters To The Editor

## *A South Vietnamese Soldier Writes*

I have just received a letter from a South Vietnamese soldier in Vietnam (a former constituent) who retreated from the DMZ. His language is very straightforward, but I will not change anything because it will help the American people who are saturated with cliches and hypocritical euphemisms to know the other side of the story. Here are a few excerpts (when my correspondent says "we" he refers to himself and his South Vietnamese comrades in arms):

"Enemy fire was not so terrible really, I have known much worse; we were not afraid at all, we could have stayed, but we did not want to fight the Reds . . . What for? Why should we fight them? They have never harmed us. But the corrupted Vietnamese leaders in Saigon and the Americans who live in luxury and debauchery in Saigon have harmed us. These Americans and these Vietnamese traffic in heroin and opium; they share the proceeds with one another; the Vietnamese are the high officials; the Americans are U.S. officials which include military, civilian and CIA personnel; they live lavishly with villas, cars, mistresses; each of them spend in one night what we soldiers, with one wife and three or four children take one year to earn. That is why we all agree: (1) it is too stupid to die for nothing; (2) it is even criminal to kill the guys in front because they do not deserve to die, they are unfortunate fellows like us; we should kill instead the corrupted leaders in Saigon and their dirty Saigon-American friends . . . [note: he makes a distinction between the Americans who live in the U.S. and who are not involved and the despised Saigon-Americans who are war profiteers] . . . who have made shambles of our country.

Since the Americans killed [sic] President Ngo Dinh Diem and installed a new regime of yes-yes men, corruption stinks to the sky. We want to tear down the corrupted. Since the Communists want to do the same job, we leave it to them. What we want before all is independence, then we shall freely choose the leaders we respect. With the Americans sitting right on our head we are anything but free. That is why we are more and more mad at President Nixon. His withdrawal is interminable, hence we have no independence. His Vietnamization shall never work, because he is fighting not only the Communists but also the whole Vietnamese population which are mad at the corrupted Americans and Vietnamese who rule them.

"There is a brave U.S. major, who acted as adviser and who probably meant well, who saw us packing and leaving and who asked me—probably because I have many ribbons for gallantry on my chest—why we did not make the slightest effort to resist and save our country from communism, etc., etc. . . . I looked at him silently for a long moment, shrugged my shoulders, and went away without answering, because I cannot tell him what I tell you in this letter. Some of us, in other units, fight by sheer reflex, like robots, but they will quit too, because they also feel the same way as we do. For the time being we just quit the battlefield, but in our next step we shall join the Communist forces.

"We hate the corrupted. Why don't you come back to lead us?"

I concur, but I also advocate reunification and neutrality for the entire Vietnam.

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# Letters To The Editor

## One Who Was There Assesses the CIA's Job in Laos

A brief article in The Washington Post of December 27 quoted Congressman G. V. Montgomery as saying "What I know about Laos is that the CIA has done a pretty lousy job and has been ineffective."

One could answer such an assertion by simply saying that as the chairman of the House Select Committee on U. S. Involvement in Southeast Asia, he should know more about Laos than that, particularly when what little he knows is manifestly wrong.

I spent 17 years as a CIA employee and left in early 1968 because of my basic opposition to United States involvement in Southeast Asia. My last four years in the agency were totally involved with Asian affairs. My knowledge of what CIA has done and has not done are obviously more detailed than Mr. Montgomery's, but it seems to me that if he is going to make public statements, he should at least take into consideration facts which have been well publicized.

It is clear (at least to me) from the Saigon dateline on the piece in question, that the congressman arrived at his remarkable conclusion after discussion with military sources in Vietnam who have been itching for at least six years to expand their own operations into Laos. Their desires in this direction must increase daily as the American role in Vietnam winds down. If they don't find something new, the time may come when they have no war at all to fight.

In order to assess CIA performance in Laos it is necessary to know what it was asked to do.

CIA involvement in Laos stems from the agreement by the U.S.A., and other powers involved, to withdraw all foreign troops from Laos. The agreement was signed in 1962. It became apparent immediately thereafter that the North Vietnamese, in violation of the agreement, were continuing to send irregular forces and supplies to the Communist Pathet Lao. Their purpose was clear—to establish a Communist government in Vientiane which would allow the North Vietnamese free access to the portion of the Ho

Chi Minh trail in Laos and the road across central Laos to Thailand. The government of the United States decided to mount an operation to thwart the North Vietnamese purpose. Because the Geneva agreement precluded the use of U.S. military forces or advisers, CIA was designated as the executive agent to handle the training and support of the non-Communist Meo tribes who lived in and around the Plain of Jars. The Meo force was the only army in Laos capable of stopping the Pathet Lao (supported by the North Vietnamese) from quickly over-running the Plain of Jars, which was essential to the Communist purpose.

The point to remember here is that the decision to act was a U.S. government decision; not one arrived at by CIA. I think the decision was wrong, just as I think almost every other decision with regard to our involvement in Indochina has been and continues to be wrong. That is not the point under discussion.

The question is: what kind of job did CIA do with the task assigned it in Laos?

The answer, based on any comparison with the U.S. military effort in Vietnam, would have to be. *A spectacular success.*

My personal knowledge of the operation ended in mid-1967, the last time I visited Long Tieng, the seat of the headquarters of Gen. Vang Pao, the Meo leader. At that time there were roughly 35,000 Meo tribesmen under arms fighting daily with the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese irregulars. This force had been fighting successfully for five years and inasmuch as they held Long Tieng until a few days ago, continued for another four years to beat off a vastly superior Communist army. The CIA contingent supporting them in Laos and in Thailand did not exceed 40 Americans, plus a small air contingent which air-delivered supplies and personnel. Imagine 40 Americans in support of 35,000 friendly tribesmen. Compare this with the situation in Vietnam in 1967 when we had about 400,000 U.S. troops fighting for, and supporting, an army of roughly 1 million Vietnamese, and they were losing at

every turn. Had the U.S. Army had the responsibility for the support of the Meo, we probably would have had a minimum of 15,000 U.S. troops in Laos. Naturally that figure would have included cooks, bakers, pastry chefs, many chauffeurs for the many generals, PX managers, laundry officers, radio and television station personnel, motion picture projectionists, historians, social scientists, chaplains and a variety of similar types essential to the conduct of a war by the U.S. military, but which the CIA operation with the Meo seemed to be able to forgo.

For eight years this ragtag force defended its area of responsibility, protecting the backside of the South Vietnamese—with no U.S. troops fighting at their side, not to say in front of them as in Vietnam. They accomplished this with the support of a handful of Americans and with the loss of perhaps three or four American lives.

Can anyone seriously suggest that this was a lousy job?

In fairness to Congressman Montgomery, it is not entirely his fault that he is not fully informed. The role of the CIA with the Meo has been an open secret for years; known to Lao of high and low degree, foreign journalists, diplomats in Vientiane and almost anyone else with the interest to find out. Given this situation it would be comic if it were not tragic that the Executive branch of the U.S. government was willing to share this secret with Lao generals known to be trafficking in opium, but not with the Congress of the United States.

Perhaps someday Mr. Montgomery and his colleagues in the Congress will establish a real CIA watchdog committee, long overdue, which will give the agency the scrutiny required. When that is done I am sure a substantial number of lousy operations will be uncovered. I am confident, however, that when they take a long hard look at the CIA operation with the Meo in the general context of the war in Southeast Asia, there will be general approval.

THOMAS F. McCOY.

Washington.

16 MAY 1977

# Letters To The Editor

## *The CIA's Contribution*

I am moved to respond to your editorial "Taking the CIA on Faith" (April 18). The editorial contained some interpretations of statements made by CIA Director Richard Helms with which I must take exception.

The editorial repeated Mr. Helms' statement that the public cannot judge the value or the efficiency of the operations of the agency because of the secrecy requirements which surround it. This fact is unassailable and was stressed by Mr. Helms; however, the editorial ignored the common sense of this statement and continued to bemoan the lack of public scrutiny. While secrecy is an important component of the operations of an intelligence organization, a dearth of information does exist concerning the general theory and practice of intelligence operations; this information is available—without the need for a security clearance—to the interested individual. Furthermore, public information is available, often to the chagrin of CIA officials, concerning more specific details of certain agency operations, witness the operations of the Meo tribesmen in Laos and the U-2 operations over the U.S.S.R. (which was highly successful by all accounts until May 1960). Therefore, while much of its daily operations are necessarily veiled in secrecy, the agency is not the ultra-secret "invisible government" as some would have us believe.

Mr. Helms' statement that the CIA is not involved in drug traffic seem to me to be as definitive as he could make it. The nature of intelligence operations, however, often necessitates the conduct of business with certain individuals who may have connections with the traffic of drugs. So long as the operations of the agency do not promote the worldwide traffic of drugs, it must be accepted that we will occasionally have to deal with these individuals so long as they can be of value to these operations.

Finally, the editorial questions, "how

much intelligence is enough?" The obvious answer is that there can never be too much knowledge. The policy planners and decision makers who are charged with the responsibility for charting the course of the United States in the sensitive area of international affairs must be provided with, as Mr. Helms stated, "a broad and detailed base of foreign intelligence." The need for objectivity in the production of intelligence is paramount, as Mr. Helms stated in his speech. This objectivity is required in order to preclude the agency from becoming ambitious, and either making its own policy or inducing "policy makers to posit an American interest..."

The CIA continuously makes a great contribution to the security of this nation and to the well-being of its citizens. Mr. Helms' speech has served to inform the American public just a bit more as to the extent of that contribution.

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